SABBATICAL REPORT

BEV BISHOP
SOUTHCITY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

TERM 3 2010

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Sabbatical focus:
To investigate models of Restorative Practice and their use within Primary Schools. To develop the process and procedures for implementation of Restorative Practices at Southcity Christian School.

Key inquiry question:
How can the principles of Restorative practice be applied in the primary school setting, to enhance relationships and reduce inappropriate behaviour.

Subsidiary questions:
- What does research say about the best practice in dealing with offending and conflict?
- What is the difference between a punitive approach and that of restorative practices for the pupils and for the school?
- What steps have different schools taken to introduce restorative practices within their school? How effective has this been? How is the effectiveness measured?
- What do students think of the restorative practices, and how might this approach have changed their behaviour?
- How will restorative practices enhance the Behaviour Management practices at Southcity Christian School and what will this look like in practice?

Acknowledgements:
The Ministry of Education for approving my sabbatical, and to the Southcity Christian School Board of Trustees for allowing me the time away from school.

My thanks too, to those principals and their staff of the schools that I visited for their generous time allocation, their openness and willingness to share their journey with me.

Purpose:
Wherever groups of people live, work or play together, there is the potential for inappropriate behaviour and conflict. At Southcity Christian School we follow Biblical principles, however at the same time seek to follow "best practice" and research theory to benefit our whole community. This sabbatical investigated restorative practices at primary schools, with the view to enhancing the Behaviour Management practices at our school.

Background:
Review of the Behaviour management policy and procedures identified that current practices were not making much difference to unacceptable behaviour. It was decided to investigate Restorative practices with the hope that aligning our behaviour management processes more closely with current theory and expectations based on positive guidance procedures, far greater success would be achieved.

Findings:
Since the early 1990's there has been growing concern about how discipline problems are dealt with in schools, as the suspension and expulsion rates escalate. The current punitive disciplinary systems are obviously not working.

Restorative justice offers an innovative approach to both offending or challenging behaviour, because it puts repairing harm done to relationships and people, above the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment.

This approach however, challenges many deeply held beliefs that misbehaviour should be punished and that this threat of punishment will be sufficient to ensure that potential wrongdoers comply with society's rules. For many, accountability means that the wrongdoer must be punished – because for every action, there is a consequence. However, genuine accountability means facing up to what you have done, taking responsibility for your actions, deciding how to make things right, and then taking steps to repair the damage.

In our traditional response to discipline (punitive), the focus is on:
- What rule was broken?
- Who's to blame?
- What punishment is deserved?

Restorative practices on the other hand, focus on:
- Misconduct being a violation of people and relationships.
- Violations creating obligations and responsibilities (liabilities).
- Seeking to heal the relationships and to put things right.

Key values and key skills are vital in any school wishing to undertake Restorative Practices.
Key values that encourage restoration are – participation, respect, honesty, humility, accountability, empowerment and hope. Participants will also need to develop the ability to be emotionally articulate.
Key skills include active listening, facilitating dialogue and problem solving, listening to and expressing emotion, and empowering others to take ownership of their problems.

Before embarking on the journey of restorative practices, schools will need to ascertain whether everything they do at their school is informed by the ethos whereby they focus on building, maintaining and repairing relationships and community. All policy and processes will need to be scrutinised, as the message these give may not be restorative in nature. The above values and the whole restorative approach can be so easily undermined if people engage in aggressive body language, tone, phrasing of questions, or summing up of events. Teachers must be seen to be modelling the values and skills necessary and creating opportunities for these to be developed.

The ultimate aim of restorative practices within schools is to build a school community based on co-operation, mutual understanding and respect. Restorative practices provide processes for holding students accountable for their actions and behaviours while building a nurturing school environment.

Potential advantages for a school where RP is practiced are:
- Safer, more caring environment where learning and teaching is more effective.
- Greater commitment to listening to each other.
- Reduction in bullying and interpersonal conflicts.
- Greater emphasis on responses to inappropriate behaviour that seek to reconnect young people.
- An increased belief of the ability of young people to take responsibility for their choices.

Building and nurturing relationships is at the heart of a successful and happy school. Repairing harm done to relationships through conflict and inappropriate behaviour is the next priority. People are more likely to want to work and achieve success in such an environment. For real change to take place, however, there will need to be time (at least 3 – 5 years) and resources (key people and funding) allocated to restorative projects.

Observations from school visits:
- A team is needed to lead implementation.
- Action plans developed detailing the way forward.
- Plenty of professional development, both external and in house is needed.
- Through circle time in class, children learn to express their feelings and become emotionally articulate.
- RP is linked to other programmes already running in schools, like peer mediation, Kia Kaha, Keeping ourselves safe.
- Consequences for play time incidents are community focussed like picking up rubbish, shovelling dirt, weeding gardens, as opposed to withdrawal, because this is seen to be restoring the relationship with the community.
- Community meetings to explain the concepts, answer questions and assist with how they can use RP at home.
- Pamphlets developed for parents.
- Invest the time – it is worth it.

Conclusion:
The implementation of Restorative Practices demands a major shift in thinking and the realignment of beliefs about discipline. Moving from a punitive based discipline system to one underpinned by relational values requires a change in the hearts and minds of many. I hope that through a developing shared vision for Restorative Practices, a period of experimentation and adaptation, and a growing confidence for all involved, that Southcity Christian School will become a truly restorative school.

References:

Buckley, S., & Maxwell, G. (2007). *Respectful Schools :Restorative Practices in Education,* Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University of Wellington and the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Wellington, New Zealand

Davison, S. (2004). *Restorative Justice in Schools: An idea whose time has come.* Paper delivered at the Charting the Future Conference: The way forward for Secondary Education. Wellington, New Zealand, 18-20 April 2004.

Drewery, W. (2007). Restorative practices in schools: Far-reaching implications. In G. Maxwell & J. H. Liu (Eds.), *Restorative justice and practices in New Zealand: Towards a restorative society. (pp. 199-214).* Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington

Hopkins, B. (2004). Restorative justice in schools. In J. Wearmouth, R. C. Richmond & T. Glynn (Eds.), *Addressing pupils' behaviour: Responses at district, school and individual levels* (pp 19-29). David Fulton, London

Moxon, J., Skudder, C., & Peters, J. (2006). *Restorative Solutions for Schools.* Essential Resources Educational Publishers Limited, Invercargill

The Restorative Practices Development Team, School of Education, University of Waikato. (2003). *Restorative Practices for Schools: A Resource.* Waikato University, Hamilton, New Zealand

Thorsborne, M., & Blood, P. (2006). *Overcoming resistance to whole school uptake of Restorative Practices.* Paper delivered at the International Institute of Restorative Practices "The Next Step: Developing Restorative Communities, Part 2" Conference. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, October 2006.

Thorsborne, M., & Blood, P. (2005). *The challenge of Culture Change: Embedding Restorative Practice in Schools.* Paper delivered at the Sixth International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices: "Building a Global Alliance for Restorative practices and Family Empowerment." Sydney, Australia. March 2005.

Thorsborne, M., & Vinegrad, D. (2004). *Restorative Practices in Classrooms: Rethinking Behaviour Management.* Inyahead Press, Queenscliff

Thorsborne, M., & Vinegrad, D. (2002). *Restorative Practices in Schools: Rethinking Behaviour Management.* Inyahead Press, Queenscliff

Thorsborne, M., & Vinegrad, D. (2006). *Restorative Practices and Bullying: Rethinking Behaviour Management.* Inyahead Press, Queenscliff

Websites:

www.thorsborne.com.au
www.transformingconflict.org/Restorative_Approaches_and_Practices.htm
www.iirp.org/whatisrp.php
www.hansberry.com.au
www.safersanerschools.org
www.teacherswork.ac.nz/journal/volume2_issue2/carroll_lind.pdf
www.restorativeschools.org.nz
www.restorativejustice.com
www.vnc.qld.edu.au/rpsite/
www.inyahead.com.au